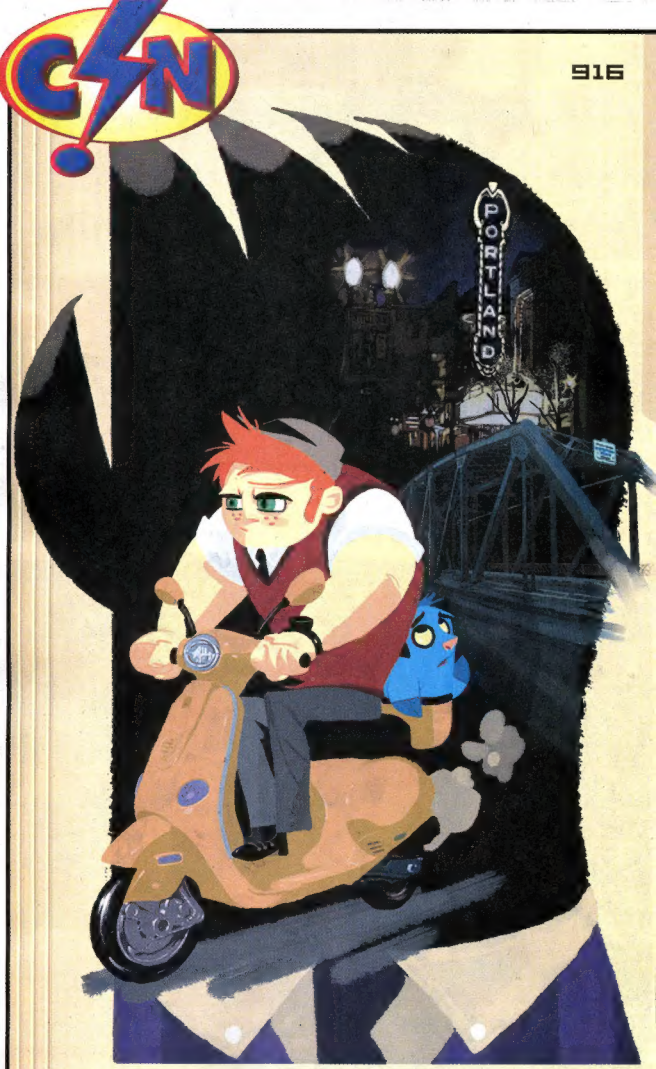


PIGTALE

THIS LITTLE PIGGY...

Pursuing a career as a private detective can be challenging. There's all sorts of problems to deal with: licensing, training, life-threatening danger, late payments, seedy locales, anthropomorphic pigs...

Okay, the last problem may be unique to Boston Booth.

So who is Boston Booth? He's the star of ***Pigtale***, an Image series that marks the comics debut of writer/artist *Ovi Nedelcu*. "***Pigtale*** takes place in contemporary Portland, Oregon. It tells the exciting adventure of Boston Booth, an amateur private eye whose life is in financial and professional turmoil, when suddenly he runs into Clyde, an intelligent talking pig desperate to get away from his violent wolf stepbrother Taxx," Nedelcu explained. "Together, Boston & Clyde venture off into the face of danger to help one another overcome their fears, rescue loved ones, and save the city from Taxx; who's bent on destroying Clyde, getting his revenge, and using the Super-Plasma device to conquer the city and reign supreme."

A struggling PI in a contemporary northwestern metropolis... so how'd the talking pig become a part of the mix? "I'm not really sure what led to the decision to mix the two worlds, but I *do* know that it makes for a better hook. If I came up to you and said, 'Hey, did you hear about that detective that rides around on a scooter?' you'd probably say 'huh?' but if I came up to you and said 'Hey! Did you hear about that detective that ran into a talking pig!?' you'd probably fall off your seat with anticipation!" Nedelcu said with a laugh.. "So that's the kind of response I want to get from the public. That's the kind of mood I'm trying to convey with mixing the two worlds.

"I just love the dynamic of having that fairy tale aspect of it. I'm a big fan of children's literature—children's books, fairy tales, folklore, and the like—so I have all that in my blood. I like a lot of fairy tale stories by authors like the Brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Anderson, Aesop, Roald Dahl, Silverstein, Provensens. I'm also a fan of Looney Tunes—*Chuck Jones'* run on it, to be more specific—and the old school Disney, back when the nine old men were doing them with all the talking animals and what-not. I never want to get too serious with my work; I think it deadens it.

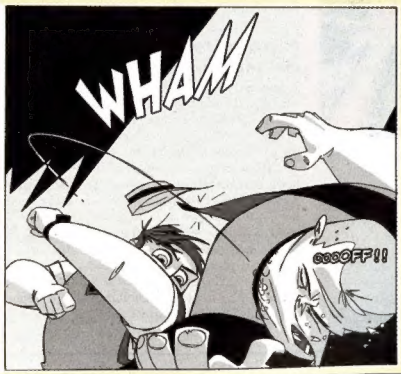
"Creatively its great, I get to write and draw real-life situations about human characters that people can relate to and also go wild with the animal 'fairy tale' world and make things interesting in both the story and drawing's. I get the best of both worlds, so to speak. How do talking animals relate in the real world? Well, they *don't*! That's what makes it interesting! That's what makes it a 'fairy tale.'"

Part of the appeal of the series is the ***Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*** juxtaposition of believable human characters and quirky anthropomorphics. That means that Boston Booth is pivotal to the success of the series; if he's not a likeable, believable character, then the whole concept flops. So Nedelcu has focused a great deal of attention amateur private investigator. "Boston is kind of a goofy guy, but in a cool way. He's the underdog. The bricks on his path start to fall from under his feet as he finds himself in the middle of trouble he never asked for. He's definitely *not* your college quarterback—even though he's sizable enough to be—but he's not a coward. In fact, he is the opposite. He is foolishly courageous and usually acts on instinct instead of thinking things through. But that's part of his advantage in the field of crime fighting/investigation. Sometimes if you think, you're dead. He's also a confused and frustrated fellow when it comes to love and relationships; both with his grandma, his dead parents—and of course, his crush on Carmen, the girl of his dreams.

"I'm not sure where his character really stemmed from, but I think it's a combination of character traits we all have in us. Dealing with financial problems, love, careers, etc. I'm just trying to take all of those and present them in a new, fresh and entertaining way to which hopefully people can relate to. I find myself in these kinds of situations each day, and sometimes I seriously don't know what to do with *my* intelligent talking pig! It's frustrating." Nedelcu joked.

Pigtale has elicited a great deal of positive attention from Image—and praise from the publisher, *Erik Larsen*, who said of the book, "***Pigtale*** is one of those books that fall out of the sky and you have to wonder, 'Where did *this* guy come from?' And I mean that in the best possible where-have-you-been-all-my-life kind of way. This guy is, simply put, incredible—and I've got a strong feeling about this one. Generally, when that happens, it's a book that catches readers and retailers by surprise and they come back at me a few month later and say to me, 'why didn't you *tell me* this was going to be good?'... I think readers and retailers alike are simply going to fall in love with this book."

Pretty intense praise for a first-timer! So what's Nedelcu's background, and how did he end up bringing ***Pigtale*** to Image? "Back when I was in high school, I started to get serious about making a career out of being a comic book artist. I always read them and liked drawing the characters while growing up, but it wasn't until high school that I realized I could maybe one day make a living doing them. I have to thank two of my good friends, *Efrain Luna III* and *Paul Harmon*, for inspiring that thought. They would always have all these comics with them and constantly be drawing comic pages in class. So that really pushed me to want to do them also.



"Back then I was looking at the works of *Will Eisner, Jim Lee, Dale Keown*, and the whole Image bunch; I was fourteen at the birth of Image! Along with that were those *Burne Hogarth* anatomy books—which are still on my shelf, mind you).

"I soon grew out of that stage—with the exception of my interest in *Will Eisner*—when I got into college and realized that there was a lot more art out there outside of comics that I wasn't exposed to in my teens. I started looking at a lot of illustrators, fine artists, fashion designers, sculptors, you name it. I was like a sponge, absorbing all that great art. That, and working in animation really opened my eyes and helped me develop what my style is today."

Nedelcu offered some more details regarding that animation background. "I have worked—and still do work—in the animation industry. When I was still in college I got hired by WB animation to do some visual development for a few of their shows. There I met a bunch of very talented and respected artist (including *Bruce Timm* and *Glen Murakami*) who helped me sharpen my animation skills. Out of the bunch were *AJ Jothikumar* and *Shannon Tindle*, who really looked out for me in my first days in the professional world. Both are great artists, and to this day I still ask and respect their opinion.

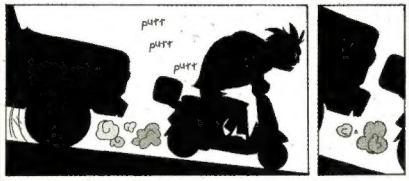
"After WB I went on to a few other studios—Sony, Carton Network, BKN—but eventually, five years later I found myself living in Portland, Oregon doing work for Vinton Studios and producing my comic book. When I was living in LA I promised my wife we would one day move back to her home town of Portland—so last year I kept that promise, and here I am!"

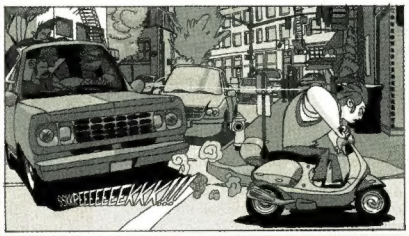
A look at ***Pigtale*** makes it clear that Nedelcu is bringing his animation aesthetics to play in his comics work. "Animation—or I should say *good* animation—really forces you to use the least amount of line work to express yourself. It forced me to really get to the essence of a drawing and make sure every line counted; to capture the expression, gesture, attitude, and life of a character in the fewest amount of lines is; It's deceivingly simple. Some artists who I think do it extremely well are *Alex Toth, Al Hirschfeld, Chuck Jones*, and *Will Eisner*, just to name a few; that's why all of them are some of my heroes. *Bruce Timm* does it really well also, he once told me something I will never forget: 'Think more, draw less.'" Those artists just *get it*. And hopefully one of these days, I will too!"

Pigtale is a true one-man effort—and most of it is hand-done. "The tones are done in Photoshop, but everything else is hand-drawn and inked. I first started 'toning' the pages with markers, but soon realized I was going to be paying a lot of money for markers, plus I was getting bad headaches from the smell, so I put two and two together to form Photoshop. It's a godsend, I tell you!"

What are the pros and cons of doing a book entirely as a one-man operation? "The pros are that I get all the creative freedom possible; the drawbacks are that I get all the creative freedom possible!" Nedelcu said. ". No one is there to baby-sit me or tell me what to do, or let me know if what I just wrote really sucks. I'm kind of in my own world. But I like it that way; if I screw up then so be it—I'll learn and move on. Sometimes you only learn and get better when you get burned. Hopefully that doesn't happen too often!... But there's just something so great and liberating about being in the driver's seat of your creation and being able to break all the rules if you want to without anyone telling you 'you can't.'"

Nedelcu feels like the comics market is particularly accepting of animation-influenced styles currently. "From the looks of things, it looks like it. I see a lot of animation-influenced artists now doing comics. Ten years ago, there really wasn't that many that seemed to be influenced by the animation style.





"I think diversity is great, and I can't wait for comics to *really* open the door a little wider and see the possibilities it has to offer as an art form. But with diversity also comes trends, which I'm *not* really a fan of. To tell you the truth, sometimes I don't like being labeled as an 'animation-cartoony' guy, because it seems to becoming more and more trendy and I see a lot of young up-and-coming artists just buying those cartoony-ashcan-sketch-books and trying to mimic them without going to the source—that is, going to the artists who influenced the guys in animation back in the day, who then influenced the leading designers and animators in animation today, who then influenced the guys putting out those cartoony-ashcans today—and really learning why everyone in that hierarchy was influenced in the first place. *sigh*.

"It's not only in animation, its in children's books, comics, film and so on. *Go to the source*—which in the end comes down to studying life itself and creating your own style. That's just my opinion, But then again, what do I know? My artistic venture has just begun and aside from studying life, I'm also still influenced by a lot of great masters. So I have a long ways to go..."

Is Pigtale a limited series, the first in a series of limited series, or an ongoing series? "All of the above," Nedelcu quipped. "It's an ongoing series with three major story arcs that will span over twenty or thirty issues. I still haven't decided on what issue number the book will be capped and ended on. But it's going to be a great ride, so hop on board!"

Does Nedelcu have anything else in the works? "My long-term plan would be to finish the single issues of ***Pigtale*** and then eventually bind the entire story together in a collected edition. I also have a spin-off story that could keep the stories of Boston Booth going, sort of a 'the many adventures of...' type of thing. So I have a lot of things I could do once I have the story finished—but for now my main focus is finishing it and making sure it's a great read not only for the public, but for me, too!

"I've also been working with director Henry Selick at Vinton Studios here in Portland, doing some character design and storyboard work for the short film he's directing called ***Moongirl***. Up next on the list is Neil Gaiman's ***Coraline***, which *Henry Selick* will also be directing as a feature film at Vinton Studios.

"Aside from that I'm currently designing and writing a screenplay for an animated feature film I want to pitch soon, and have been hard at work getting the second issue of ***Pigtale*** done. Besides that, I've been doing freelance design and development work for various studios, and I'm also developing a collaborative idea with a friend of mine who also has a book coming out from Image. And finally, and most importantly, I've been spending time with my family, which I don't get enough of because of work. My wife has been very supportive with what I've been doing so far, and puts up with me far more than she ought to!"

Readers can prepare to "pork out" in mid-January, when ***Pigtale #1***, a $2.95 comic, is scheduled for release.

BY CLIFF BIGGERS

Courtesy your friendly neighborhood comics outlet!

Comic Shop Newsarama

Produced by ***Comic Shop News*** in cooperation with *Matt Brady* and *newsarama.com*

Moving Quitely Towards a Two-Year Exclusive

Extending and enhancing his relationship with DC, artist *Frank Quitely* has signed a two-year exclusive contract, which will allow him to call the various imprints of DC home for his upcoming work.

"I've been offered an exclusive on a number of occasions in the past, but I've always been more interested in keeping my options open, but this time it looks like being on an exclusive is actually going to suit me," Quitely told ***Comic Shop Newsarama's*** *Matt Brady*.

Quitely credits VP *Dan DiDio* with being both the deal-maker and one of the main reasons he was attracted to DC's offer. "Dan has been very flexible with the way he's worked out a deal for me that works for all of us—financially, creatively and schedule-wise.

"I had a great time working at Marvel—but when I wanted to do a creator-owned project, Vertigo was the best place to go. I got the opportunity to paint the Destiny story for *[Neil] Gaiman's Sandman: Endless Nights* book, and then *Karen [Berger]* was great to work with on ***We3***, and now I'm gearing up for a DC company-owned character—it's as simple as that. Well, that and the fact that DC have been great to deal with since I went back there."

Quitely said that producing the critically acclaimed ***We3*** with *Grant Morrison* was a high point in his career to date. "Working with Grant is always a good reason to say yes to any project for starters," Quitely said. "Then there was the creative freedom of working on our own characters, and the freedom of being on a mature readers title, and the fact that it's so different from most other comics—it's emotional and violent and touching at the same time, and seems to appeal a lot to female readers as well.

"The experimental angle was also very attractive—Grant wanted to tell a very different type of story from normal, and he wanted it to be delivered in a specific way, and that was a very enjoyable challenge. He had some very strong ideas about how he wanted the story-telling to work and we constantly discussed scenes and effects and how best to portray them, it was a very collaborative effort.

"Overall, I'm very happy with it—we've been pretty ambitious with what we've tried to do, and there's a lot more to it than meets the eye on a first read."

So what about this project involving a "DC company-owned character" to which Quitely referred? DC is mum on that—but the rumor mill is centering very strongly on a reported *Grant Morrison-Frank Quitely* ***Superman*** project. Quitely refuses to confirm that rumor, although he *did* say that he's focusing on that project and that he *will* be working with *Grant Morrison*. "I'll probably do bits and pieces of other things as well from time to time, covers, for example, but there's something very specific that this is all set up for," Quitely said. Look fore word on this mystery project as news becomes available.

The Fantastic Foes

Who's self-destructive enough to take on the Fantastic Four—not just once, but again and again and again? That's a question that *Robert Kirkman* found himself pondering—and the result is a lighthearted adventure that lets readers see the FF in action from the other side of the battle.

Fantastic Four: Foes, a five-part limited series by *Robert Kirkman & Cliff Rathburn*, follows a group of bad guys from the start of their evil plot all the way whatever happens in the end, learning what the villains were thinking the entire way. As you might suspect, it's both an educational and an entertaining experience...

"A hero is only as good as his villains and the Fantastic Four are the greatest superheroes in the world," Kirkman told ***Comic Shop Newsarama's*** *Ryan McLelland*. "They have the most colorful and diverse rogues gallery in comics. Batman has a bunch of psycho dudes, Spider-Man has a bunch of psycho animal dudes, and the FF have villains of almost every possible kind."

And what a rich rogues' gallery it is: Super-Skrull, Annihilus, The Red Ghost, Mole Man, The Puppet Master, The Mad Thinker, Klaw, Psycho Man, Diablo, and Dragon Man, just to name a few. As the book follows the villainous scheme from start to finish, Kirkman offers readers a chance to see the bad guys in a less-than-villainous light—and a chance to see why the FF constantly win.

"We're going to be focusing on the villains for the most part," Kirkman said. "But when I sat down to start the scripts the FF just screamed for more screen time so I couldn't let them down. The Foes still take center stage more or less, but Reed and crew are there just as much. I really like the interaction the FF have with their foes, so I'll be playing that up, and trying to bring back some guys we haven't seen in a while."

While the series stars a heaping helping of bad guys, there are two villains who will be noticeably absent, simply because these are two guys in a different class entirely. "(It's) pretty much everyone *but* Doctor Doom and Galactus," Kirkman explained. "I'd have liked to use Doctor Doom, of course but he's you know, dead. Also, I think he would have overpowered the other villains as far as presence goes. If you take out Galactus and Doom the rest of the villains are on a pretty even level so I think the series works much better without those two. Besides, Galactus hasn't been cool since they got rid of the big "G" on his chest and the bare legs. He's just a shadow of his former self and I don't want to perpetuate that. He deserves better."

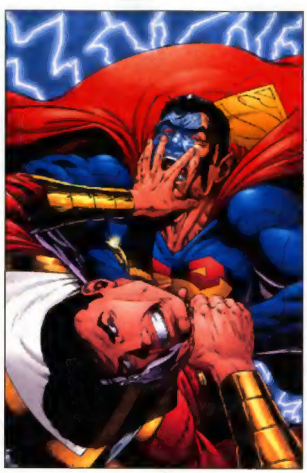
Kirkman assures readers that ***Fantastic Four: Foes*** isn't a throwaway series. "This series is as important to pick up as any other book. I think people will find I'm weaving a pretty tight continuity between *Marvel Team-Up*, this mini, and ***Jubilee***, as well as all the other Marvel books—but since I'm writing all these, I can really touch on stuff in the other books and that's always a lot of fun. This is also probably your only chance to see some of these guys, I mean, let's face it, people aren't beating down the doors screaming for Gray Gargoyle. I like him, I'm using him, and this will probably be the only time for a while."

With this many villains attacking in the span of five issues, is it possible that Mr. Fantastic, Human Torch, Invisible Woman, and The Thing might finally be 'beaten'? "The FF get beaten all the time—they just eventually just turn it around," Kirkman says. "This is comics, and we all know the heroes, for the most part, do always win. So as a writer I have to make the process interesting. It's not if they'll win but how they'll win and what they'll have to do to make sure they win."

Fantastic Four: Foes is scheduled for January 5th release.

Ins & Outs

Out! *Chuck Austen*, who has left the creative team of ***Action Comics*** as of #823. *J.D. Finn* is filling in on *Action #s 824 & 825*, while *Judd Winick* is the writer for ***Action #826***, the kickoff of a three-parter featuring art by *Ian Churchill & Norm Rapmund*. The storyline, which continues into ***Adventures of Superman #639*** and ***Superman #216***, teams Superman and Shazam in battling an evil that threatens Metropolis, and serves as a sequel, of sorts, to this summer's ***First Thunder*** miniseries, written by Winick and illustrated by *Joshua Middleton*, which chronicles the first meeting of Superman and Captain Marvel.



In! *Sanford Greene*, who is stepping in as artist of ***Army of Darkness: Shop 'Til You Drop (Dead) #3;*** original series artist *Nick Bradshaw* will return for the final issue of the four-part series.

Out: ***Identity Crisis #1***, which has sold out of all three of its printings. This joins ***Identity Crisis #s 2, 4 & 6***, which we reported as sellouts in last week's issue of *CSN*.

In! Two additional *Bernie Wrightson* short stories have been added Desperado Publishing's ***Freak Show***, collecting the compelling and disturbing graphic novel by *Bruce Jones* & Wrightson.

Out! ***The Art of Greg Horn***, which has sold out of its first printing from Image. "I'm ecstatic to hear of this great response to my first art book," Horn said. Image is producing a second printing to meet the demand for the lavishly illustrated volume.

In! *Michael Bair*, who has renewed his DC exclusive contract for another year. "I've been working with DC for more than twenty years, and the ride just gets better and better," Bair said. "I had a blast working with *Rags Morales* and everyone else on ***Identity Crisis***, and we're just getting warmed up for 2005!"

Out! ***Mage: The Hero Rediscovered Limited Edition Hardcover***, the hefty single-volume compilation of *Matt Wagner's* epic series, has sold out of its entire print run.

Out! *Peter Kuper's* ***The Jungle*** has sold out of its first printing from NBM in less than a month, in spite of a hefty overprinting. The company is rushing a second edition to press to meet unfilled demand for Kuper's powerful adaptation of *Upton Sinclair's* naturalistic classic.

She's Not All Bad... Just Medieval!

The return of the dark splatterpunk Lady Death from Avatar Press has already begun—but that's not the only version of the pulchritudinous heroine that readers will be able to enjoy in 2005. Avatar and creator *Brian Pulido* are also relaunching the kinder, gentler ***Medieval Lady Death*** in a new series beginning in February in a series that picks up where the CrossGen series left off.

"Imagine the mood and tone of ***Lord of The Rings***, but picture the main (anti)-heroine a powerful, pale skinned woman and her enemies ancient, magical beings called The Eldritch who use spells to thwart human warrior knights," Pulido. said "Humanity's last hope for survival is Lady Death, an outcast who is half-human, half-Eldritch, and all attitude. She is part of both clans, but belongs to neither. Bearing the sword of vengeance Lady Death roams the medieval realms protecting the very people who fear her."

Pulido assures readers that the more subdued tone and general-audiences-accessible approach will continue in ***Medieval Lady Death***. "This series continues with the same characters, mood and tone," Pulido explained. "We are very aware of the ***Medieval Lady Death*** fan base and what their tastes are, and we won't change this Lady Death *one iota*. She aspires to a heroic ideal and we won't change that. I love writing her adventures and I think my passion bleeds onto the page. I invite fans of ***Sojourn*** and ***Lady Death: a Medieval Tale*** to jump on board

"We're also being careful to make this a good jumping on point for new readers. To assure this, we've hired [former CrossGen editor] *Barbara Kesel* as editor. Barbara was my editor on ***Lady Death: a Medieval Tale***. She knows the characters as well as I do and she is the secret weapon to the success of the series".

Medieval Lady Death #s 1-4 will be illustrated by *Di Amorim*, while the next four issues feature art by *Wellington Alves*. Both artists are careful to maintain the style and feel of the original *Ivan Reis* work that set the tone for this series.

Medieval Lady Death #1, the first issue of a full-color monthly ongoing series, is scheduled for late February release.

Marvel's Metal of Honor Winner

As reported in this issue's Coming Comics—Marvel in March, the ***Ultimate Iron Man*** will star in his own solo limited series this spring... and Marvel has enlisted an acclaimed and award-winning SF author to pen the four-part limited series.

Ultimate Iron Man, which explores the history of the hero and the early years of Tony Stark's life, will be written by Hugo- and Nebula-Award-winner *Orson Scott Card*, who will make his comics debut with this series. The initial storyline will center on Tony Stark's childhood and how his parents' experiments with re-creating and rebuilding human skin/armor led to the death of his mother. This tragic event will provide the foundation for Card to delve into how Tony Stark will develop as a man and super hero.

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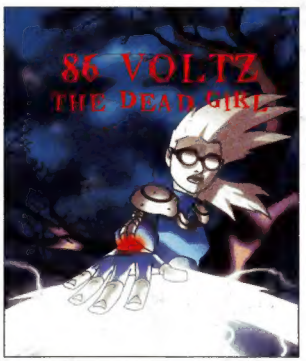
So how did Marvel and Card for the book? "I'm an enormous fan of Orson's writing, and our assistant editor *Nick Lowe* has made it his personal mission to get Mr. Card to write Iron Man," said *Joe Quesada*, Editor in Chief of Marvel Comics. "Iron Man is a strong and much-beloved character in the Marvel Universe. I know that Orson's new exploration and defining of him as a super hero will delight traditional comic fans and definitely appeal to a whole new audience of fans drawn to the science fiction element in his storytelling."

Coming Comics
Image in March

Bryan J.L. Glass & Michael Avon Oeming set out to shock readers in their new one-shot, ***86 Voltz: Dead Girl***. And 86 volts is all the star of this book needs to get her charged up... and to wake the dead. So who is 86 Volts? Where does she come from? What does she want? These questions lead to shocking answers, but don't tell 86, because she knows even less than you do.



No, it's not an automobile cleaner and vinyl restorer. ***Armor X*** is a new series by *Keith Champagne & Andy Smith*, and it's coming this spring. Armor X is the story of a teenager who comes to possess a high-tech battle-suit... a suit that makes him the most powerful human on Earth. But can a teenager who's not even old enough to drive take on the responsibility that goes with such power?

Image soars again with ***Flight Volume Two***, an original anthology edited by *Kazu Kibuishi*. This issue features more new stories centered on the theme of... oh, look at the title and figure it out for yourself! Contributors include *Jeff Smith, Michael Gagne, Sonny Liew*, and *Becky Cloonan*.

The dead are finding plenty of life at Image. *Robert Kirkman's* ***Walking Dead*** is already a cult favorite, and this spring it's about to be joined by *another* book about the walking dead... a book that actually *predates* Kirkman's series by more than a decade! ***Deadworld*** is a resurrection of the groundbreaking zombie saga by *Gary Reed & Vince Locke*—and these are all-new stories, not reprints! In this series, the back-from-the-dead are led by the sadistic Harley-riding King Zombie! A group of teens, desperately looking for signs of civilization, not only have to hide from the mindless zombie hordes, they must also contend with the intelligent, talking zombie overlords that seem to control and direct the flesh-eaters!

Mark Waid & Marc Silvestri continue their high-energy tale of those who work behind the scenes to keep our world a better place in ***Hunter-Killer #2***. Ellis joins the Hunter-Killer program in a desperate effort to make sense of his world. His survival now depends on figuring out who the good guys and bad guys are…not an easy task!

Ben Avery, Mike S. Miller, & Gregory Titus reveal what happens to all those imaginary figments sprung from the fertile minds of billions of children around the world in The ***Imaginaries***, a four-issue limited series. What happens to the imaginary friends, the childhood superheroes, the playmates and stuffed animals when the children who gave them life no longer believe in them? They go to the Imagined Nation. Join Superhero G as he explores this strange new world meeting the kinds of strange and wonderful characters that only a child could believe in,.

Feel the ***Burn*** again in March when *Joe Pruett's* Desperado Publishing relaunches the acclaimed anthology series ***Negative Burn***. Pruett has assembled an all-star team to make ***Negative Burn Winter 2005*** a book with something for everyone; look for material from *Brian Bolland, Bob Burden, Kurt Busiek, Zander Cannon, Richard Case, Amanda Conner, Shawn Crystal, Evan Dorkin, Phil Hester, Erik Larsen, Steve Lieber, Vince Locke, Darko Macan, Jim Mahfood, Ron Marz, John McCrea, B. Clay Moore, Scott Morse, Fabian Nicieza, Jimmy Palmiotti, Mike Raicht, Gary Reed, Essad Ribic, Carlos Rodriguez, Kelsey Shannon, Eric Stevenson, & Chaz Truog.*

Arthur Suydam takes readers back to the early days of his cult-favorite anti-heroes in ***The Original Adventures of Cholly & FlyTrap #1***, a selection of offbeat adventure with a tongue-in-cheek twist.

Four super-powered teens from dysfunctional families join forces to form an Image super-team in ***The Pact #1*** by *Jim Valentino*, the kickoff book in a four-issue limited series. Firebreather, Invincible, ShadowHawk, and Zephyr are the teen heroes who star in this miniseries; each issue is written by the creator of one of the four heroes. Valentino kicks off the first issue, *Jay Faerber* follows with the second, *Phil Hester* the third, and *Robert Kirkman* the fourth.

Rick Remender, Kieron Dwyer, & Salgood Sam tell the tale of a young sailor turned undead by the crew of a cursed pirate ship, in ***Sea of Red***, a monthly ongoing series. Twenty-three year-old Marco Esperanza is the only survivor, left adrift with only a plank of wood to keep him afloat. After days of drifting, he is brought aboard a strange ship. But his salvation turns to nightmare as he learns the ship is the dreaded Black Galleon. The evil mates of the Galleon aren't just pirates, they're vampires—and Marco is soon forced to join the damned crew.

The secrets of the Top Cow Universe are laid bare with great and informative "Handbook"-styled writeups on all the Cow's top characters in ***The Top Cow Bible***, a ninety-six-page trade paperback.. And as a special double-bonus, many characters will be redesigned and seen here for the very first time.

Two formerly limited edition Dynamic Forces comics are offered in more affordable editions with new cover art in ***Witchblade & Tomb Raider #1*** and ***Darkness & Tomb Raider #1.***

The Dabel Bros. present an adaptation *Raymond E. Feist's* ***The Wood Boy*** in a two-issue limited series by *Sean Jordan & Mat Broome*. This fantasy tale offers a unique side story to the events depicted in his acclaimed novel ***Magician***, offering readers an excellent introduction to Feist's RiftWar Saga.

Image collected editions for March include:

- ***A Distant Soil: Coda***, a compilation of *Colleen Doran's* ***A Distant Soil #s 32-37***, supplemented by a selection of previously unpublished art—and it's available in both trade paperback and limited edition hardcover;
- ***Frankenstein Mobster Volume One: Made Man***, collecting #s 0-7 of *Mark Wheatley's* monster-mobster series in both trade paperback and limited edition hardcover, complete with oodles of bonus features;
- ***Rex Mundi Volume Two: The River Underground***, collecting ***Rex Mundi #s 6-11*** along with supplemental material by *Arvid Nelson & Eric J*;
- ***Rising Stars: Fire & Ash, collecting Rising Stars #s 17-24***, the final chapter of the *J. Michael Straczynski* saga that goes beyond what JMS is doing in ***Supreme Power***;
- ***Wanted***, a hardcover edition of the six-issue limited series by *Mark Millar & J.G. Jones*, along with the Wanted Dossier;

Phantom Jack Shows
Up at a New Home

Phantom Jack, the series that was initially conceived as a part of Marvel's short-lived Epic line and then relocated to Image, is on the move once again. In mid-2005, *Michael San Giacomo's* story of a reporter given the power of invisibility will make its new home at *Adam Fortier's* Speakeasy Comics.

While Image had given ***Phantom Jack*** a home for its initial five-part run, San Giacomo had indicated that Image editor-in-chief *Erik Larsen* had chosen not to continue the series there. "I was quite surprised to hear about the problems Michael was having with his publisher—surprised, but happy after he and I ended up speaking," Fortier said. "In speaking with Mike about his future plans, I think they intersect nicely with my goals for Speakeasy."

"When I talked to Adam, it was clear that he 'got it'" San Giacomo said. "He read and enjoyed ***Phantom Jack*** and understood where I was coming from."

For readers unfamiliar with ***Phantom Jack***, here's a recap: Jack Baxter (Phantom Jack) is just a guy. He doesn't want to be Batman, he just wants to do his job as a newspaper reporter. He uses his invisibility powers in clever ways Sue Storm or Lyle Norg have not thought of to get the newspaper stories that affect people's lives. He also is troubled by the reporter's 'Prime Directive' to remain detached, and sometimes ignores it for the greater good.

Speakeasy will kick off the series with a ***Phantom Jack Trade Paperback*** that will include all five Image issues as well as a new twenty-three-page prequel story and an additional twenty pages of new text and art. The newly created prequel will lead directly into issue number one and will also lead directly into a new three-issue series called ***Phantom Jack: The Nowhere Man Agenda***. Both projects are scheduled to be released by

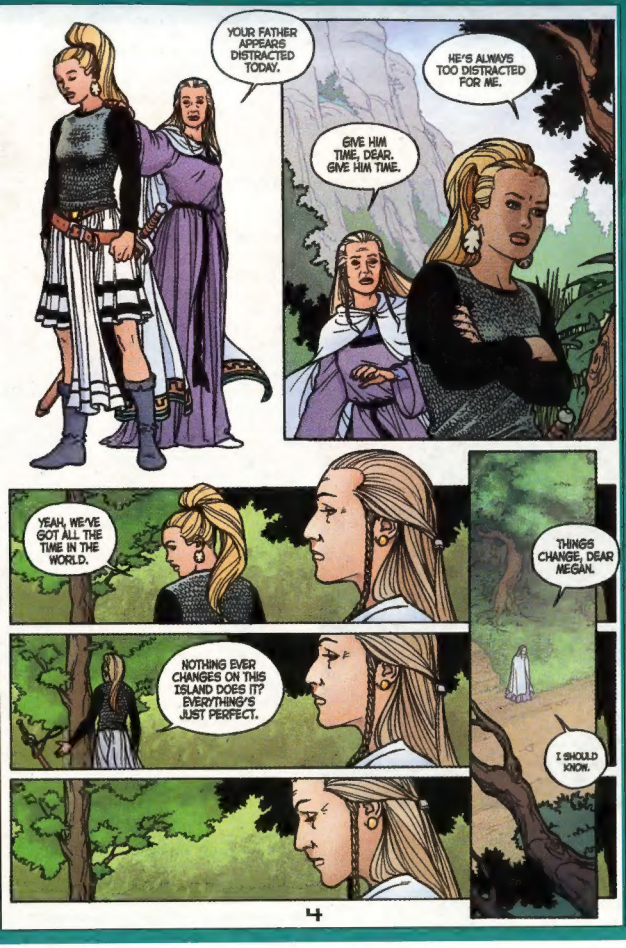
CSN Comics Debut

One Step Beyond

CrossGen fans who are longing for the sort of character-driven fantasy the company specialized, take note: Beyond Avalon is the book for you!

This new limited series by *Joe Pruett & Goran Sudzuka* is a first-class Arthurian fantasy tale with the sort of upscale production values that typified CrossGen 's offerings. The central figure of the book is Megan, the first of her kind, born upon the mythical island of Avalon. Megan, the daughter of the legendary king Arthur, craves adventure, excitement and an escape from the 'perfect' world in which she lives. Alas, sometimes we get what we wish for!... When Megan's father, also consumed by a quest for adventure, disappears, she decides to follow him. Her escape is presented to her in the form of the mists that surround the island—mists that are gateways to other worlds and dimensions. Armed with her father's recently recovered sword, Megan gathers her courage and enters the mist.... and then her adventures begin!

Beyond Avalon #1 is scheduled for early January release from Image—but you don't have to wait that long to sample the series, because *CSN Debut* has the first few pages of this series for you to peruse!


YOUR FATHER APPEARS DISTRACTED TODAY.
HE'S ALWAYS TOO DISTRACTED FOR ME.
GIVE HIM TIME, DEAR. GIVE HIM TIME.
YEAH, WE'VE GOT ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD.
THINGS CHANGE, DEAR MEGAN.
NOTHING EVER CHANGES ON THIS ISLAND DOES IT? EVERYTHING'S JUST PERFECT.
I SHOULD KNOW.
4

IT'S BEST TO FORGET THE PAST, MORGAN.
LIVE FOR THE PRESENT.
...OH, I'M SORRY, JOSEPH, I WAS LOST IN MY THOUGHTS AND DIDN'T HEAR YOU APPROACH. BUT YOU'RE RIGHT ABOUT THE PAST...
...AND ABOUT THE PRESENT. BUT I'M AFRAID THAT MEGAN IS TOO CONCERNED ABOUT THE FUTURE. THE PAST AND THE PRESENT DON'T SEEM TO HOLD HER INTEREST.
I WOULD BLAME IT ON HER YOUTH, BUT HER FATHER IS LIKE THAT AS WELL... ALWAYS THINKING ABOUT WHAT TO DO NEXT. NEVER SATISFIED WITH WHAT HE'S GOT.
SO IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN WITH THE YOUNG. NO SENSE OF HISTORY NOR THE HERE-AND-NOW. IT'S ALWAYS WHAT WILL COME TOMORROW.
A DREAMER.
YES, BUT MORE THAN THAT, AN ADVENTURER.
A DANGEROUS COMBINATION FOR SURE.
5

THAT WILL BE ENOUGH FOR TODAY. WE'LL TRY AGAIN TOMORROW.
I HOPE I WASN'T TOO ROUGH ON YOU, MY LADY?
TOO ROUGH? NO. TOO GOOD... POSSIBLY.
YOU'RE TOO KIND. I WILL SAY THAT YOU ARE GETTING BETTER WITH A SWORD. IT WON'T BE LONG BEFORE YOU'LL BE MY SUPERIOR.
I DON'T THINK THAT DAY WILL EVER COME.
I WON'T BE SURPRISED WHEN IT DOES.
SEE YOU TOMORROW, PRINCESS.
I'LL NEVER BEAT HIM.
PATIENCE, MY DEAR. PATIENCE AND PRACTICE.

I HATE WAITING AND I DON'T LIKE PRACTICING.
IT IS NOT FOR YOU TO DECIDE WHAT IS BEST. YOU ARE STILL TOO YOUNG TO MAKE THOSE DECISIONS FOR YOURSELF.
WHEN WILL I BE OLD ENOUGH?
WHEN YOU'VE DISPLAYED THE PROPER MATURITY AND DISCIPLINE FOR ONE OF YOUR POSITION.
OH. ...POOH.
HEY, LOOK. THERE'S DADDY!
DADDY!

6

...AND BY ADDING THE SALIVA OF A WOMBAT THE POTION IS COMPLETED.
WONDERFUL.
MEGAN! ARE YOU EVEN PAYING ATTENTION TO WHAT I'M TRYING TO TEACH YOU?
...HUH ...WHAT WAS THAT?
WHY I'VE NEVER HAD SUCH A DISINTERESTED PUPIL! I FEEL AS IF I AM WASTING MY TIME.
AND YOU WERE EXPLAINING SUCH A WONDERFUL LITTLE MAGICAL POTION TOO.
WHEN I WAS A CHILD I WOULD HAVE BEEN AT FULL ATTENTION.
CHILDREN TODAY JUST DON'T SEEM TO CARE ABOUT TRADITION.
GOOM.
7

SISTERS...
KING AR... UH!
I'VE JUST HEARD...
IT'S TOTALLY UNEXPECTED... I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO...
OH MY!
WELL THAT'S... MMMM.
SISTER, WHAT IS IT? WHAT NEWS DO YOU HAVE?
8

Comic Shop Newsarama

Coming Comics
Marvel in March

This is the dawning of the Age of Apocalypse... Marvel ventures once again into the Age of Apocalypse for a grand event that includes a six-issue limited series, a one-shot, a handbook, and a select assortment of tie-ins.

It all begins in the ***X-Men: Age of Apocalypse One-Shot***, featuring work by *Scott Lobdell, Tony Bedard, Larry Hama, Akira Yoshida, Adam Kubert, Andy Kubert, Tony Daniel, Mark Brooks, Paco Medina, Talent Caldwell, Roger Cruz, & Kia Asamiya.* In this introductory book, Marvel revisits the Age of Apocalypse world with four original stories. Discover the origin of Generation Next! Witness the first meeting of Sabretooth and Wild Child! Behold Weapon X's first run-in with Mariko Yashida in Japan! And you won't believe how the AoA world survived the nuclear holocaust that threatened it!

From there, it continues into the ***X-Men: Age of Apocalypse*** six-issue limited series by *Akira Yoshida & Chris Bachalo.* Apocalypse has been destroyed; the end of the world has been averted. Or has it? Sinister has just unleashed a massive force unseen, unrivaled, and unbeatable. Magneto and the X-Men's only hope lies in tracking down a retired Weapon X!

For those who need a program to keep track of all the players, there's the ***Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe—X-Men: Age of Apocalypse 2005***, offering in-depth biographies of more than forty crucial players in this saga, from Abyss to Weapon X.

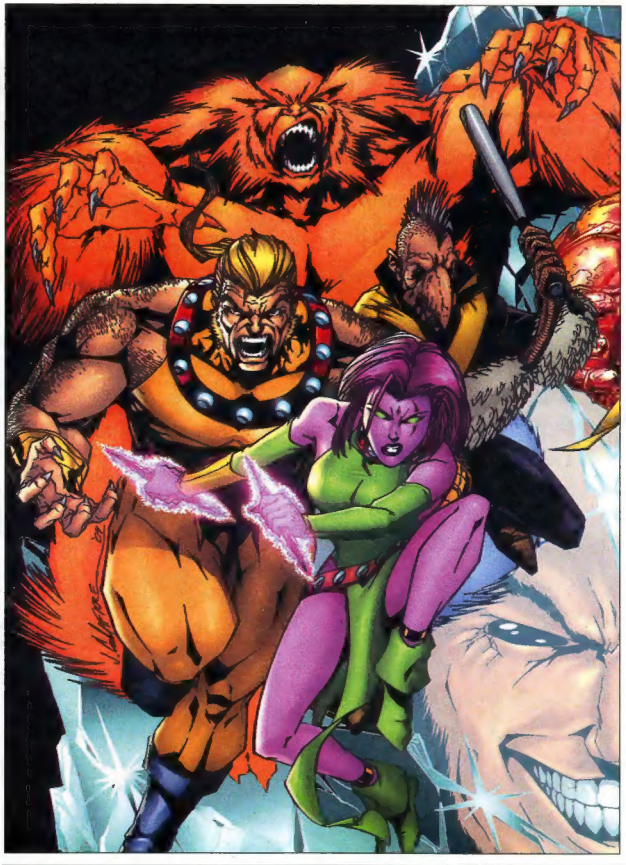
And for the completists, ***Exiles #s 60 & 61*** feature "Son of Apocalypse" by *Tony Bedard and Jim Calafiore,* a tie-in two-parter that begins when the Exiles return home to the Age of Apocalypse with the unlikeliest new teammate—Apocalypse's homicidal son, Holocaust! Can the Exiles stop fighting amongst each other long enough to complete their new assignment—killing the X-Men?!

Exactly what happened during Daredevil's year-long reign as the new Kingpin? His historic cleaning of Hell's Kitchen will finally be revealed in bloody detail in "Decalogue," a six-parter that begins in ***Daredevil #71,*** courtesy of *Brian Bendis & Alex Maleev.* Framed around the Ten Commandments, this epic story-arc is like nothing you've seen before!

Archangel joins the cast in ***Excalibur #11*** by *Chris Claremont & Aaron Lopresti* as Callisto answers a cry for help from Warren Worthington. But Callisto and Warren have some pretty unpleasant history between them…can they overcome their differences long enough to survive?

Mark Waid & Mike Wieringo say farewell to the FF in ***Fantastic Four #524...*** and they're going out with a *bang,* not a whimper! If you're hungry for one last jaw-dropping plot twist, you'll find it here... and you'll see how tough they've made it for the creative team that follows 'em on the World's Greatest Comics Magazine!

The Marvel Age line gets rebooted and renamed Marvel Adventures this spring. The first two titles under the Marvel Adventures banner are ***Marvel Adventures: Spider-Man*** by *Kitty Fross & Patrick Scherberger* and ***Marvel Adventures: The Thing*** by *Brandon Thomas & Michael O'Hare.* The former offers a retelling of the origin of the web-spinner, while the latter is an original limited series that teams up the Thing and Doctor Strange to track down a mystical item that's fallen into the wrong hands...



Mark Millar & Terry Dodson bring the year-long Spidey-riff on ***Batman: Hush*** to an end in ***Marvel Knights Spider-Man #12.*** Spidey knows who's behind his lengthy torment, and now he confronts two of his biggest—and most popular—foes... with Mary Jane's life at stake!

Marvel collects the first appearances of Iron Man, Captain America, and Ant-Man in ***Marvel Milestone: Iron Man,*** a forty-eight-page reprint comic that kicks off a line of books collecting key tales of the Avengers courtesy of such legendary talent as *Stan Lee, Joe Simon, Jack Kirby, Larry Lieber, Don Heck, & Dick Ayers.* Heck, squint just a little bit and it's almost like the glory days of ***Marvel Collector's Items Classics*** are back!...

Captain America, the Black Widow, and Nick Fury set out to solve the Paul Patterson problem in ***Marvel Team-Up #6*** by *Robert Kirkman & Scott Kolins.* Meanwhile, Titannus continues to set his master plan in motion and the stage is set for the next ***Marvel Team-Up*** story arc starting in April...

Mary Jane is back in another all-ages limited series this March, courtesy of *Sean McKeever & Takeshi Miyazawa.* After some bumps in the road, it seems MJ is finally over Spider-Man and excited to go to homecoming with her boyfriend, Harry Osborn. However, unless Harry's dad sees an improvement in his son's slipping grades, Harry can forget about *ever* seeing Mary Jane again. Add to this the fact that Liz Allen thinks best friend MJ and boyfriend Flash Thompson are fooling around behind her back, and you've got a recipe for the worst homecoming ever! See how it works out in ***Mary Jane: Homecoming.***

Steve Rogers guest-stars in ***New Invaders #8*** by *Allan Jacobsen & C.P. Smith.* Cap and the Invaders journey to the frozen north to prevent the fulfillment of an ancient Atlantean prophecy that will sink the entire surface world beneath the waves! Marvel promises that is the issue where *everything* changes.

At very long last, the ***Secret War*** saga continues with ***Secret War Book Four*** by *Brian Bendis & Gabriele Dell'Otto...* and this is the big battle issue that everyone's been waiting for as virtually every Marvel tech villain takes on virtually every Marvel NYC hero. (And for those of you following the storyline, don't miss out on ***The Pulse #8,*** which features the third part of a four-part ***Secret Wars*** tie-in focusing on Jessica Jones and Luke Cage, courtesy of *Brian Bendis & Michael Lark.*)

Getting through high school is hard enough without having to watch your back the whole time, but magic can give you a real edge over the competition. When fifteen-year-old Kim Vesco moves from Chicago to Salem, Massachusetts, she finds that the local student body is divided into rival factions of witches and non-witches, with both sides bidding for her allegiance. And if that weren't enough, an unknown force seems to want her...dead! Follow the bewitching tale in ***Spellbinders***, a six-issue limited series by *Mike Carey & Mike Perkins*.

Spidey and the Fantastic Four team up to confront the Mole Man in ***Spider-Man Team-Up Special*** by *Todd Dezago & Shane Davis*. But this time, the Mole Man doesn't seem quite so villainous! With pollution on the rise, there's only one person with the strength and fortitude to stand up for the environment -- and his name is...Mole Man? Well, his heart may be in the right place, but his methods sure aren't – and it's up to Spidey and the Fantastic Four to stop Mole Man from accidentally doing even more damage to the environment!

The Ultimate Tony Stark graduates from ensemble cast member to solo star courtesy of Hugo- and Nebula-Award-winning author *Orson Scott Card* and artist *Andy Kubert*. ***Ultimate Iron Man*** explores the backstory of the Armored Ultimate, revealing the details behind Stark's transformation into Iron Man. The first issue of this six-issue limited series will be offered with two different covers, one foil-enhanced.

In *Mark Millar & Bryan Hitch's* ***Ultimates 2 #4***, Nick Fury dispatches the Ultimates to take down their most powerful member—Thor! S.H.I.E.L.D. is convinced that the Thunder God is a former mental patient who's far too dangerous to be loose—and the awesome Asgardian is doing little to dispel that notion. Meanwhile, things are heating up between Tony Stark and Natasha Romanov...

Ultimate Secret, the second Ultimate limited series by *Warren Ellis*, is pushed back to a March launch date. Illustrated by *Steve McNiven*, this series picks up where ***Ultimate Nightmare*** leaves off. A hidden alien race is trying desperately to keep Man from reaching the stars. Cape Canaveral scientist Phillip Lawson knows of the hideous plan and will use all his considerable power to stop it...the power of Captain Mahr Vehl!

The "Hobgoblin" saga continues in ***Ultimate Spider-Man #73*** by *Brian Bendis & Mark Bagley*. Harry Osborn learns the horrifying truth of his father's existence as the evil Green Goblin. But that's only the beginning of the revelations, for young Harry also discovers the awful destiny his father has planned for him. The situation is made more complicated by the fact that Harry knows Peter's secret identity... and he knows that Spider-Man killed his father!

Mark Millar & John Romita Jr. kick off their second story arc in ***Wolverine #26***. "Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D." finds Wolverine back in the secret agency's custody... but at what cost? As the X-Men mourn their fallen team-mate in a funeral befitting a hero, Hydra celebrates the coronation of a new leader. And the reign of terror continues, as The Hand picks off the meta-humans, one by one... Will Wolverine be deprogrammed in time to stop the carnage?

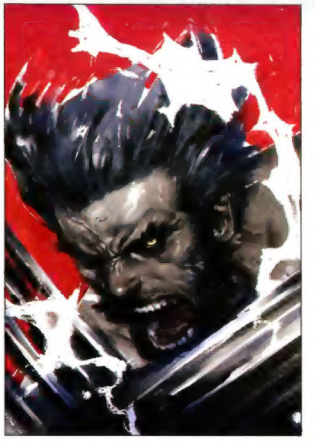
Akira Yoshida & Shin Nagasawa combine zombies, ninjas, and feral mutants in ***Wolverine: SoulTaker***, a five-issue limited series. Wolverine returns to Japan only to get caught in the middle of an ancient war between gods and demons. Can Wolverine tip the balance for good and save his soul, Japan and the world?

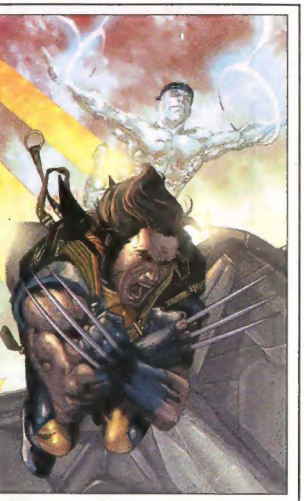
Captain America, Iron Man, and Jessica Jones learn the secret origin of Iron Lad in *Allan Heinberg & Jim Cheung's* ***Young Avengers #2***. Patriot leaves the team to go solo. And a familiar face shows up to demand a place on the team.

The never-ending story of ***X-Men: The End*** saga continues with the *first* issue of the *second* six-part miniseries in the *eighteen*-part trilogy (got all that?) courtesy of *Chris Claremont & Sean Chen*. ***X-Men: The End—Heroes & Martyrs*** picks up after the Xavier Academy has been reduced to a smoldering crater in a brutal sneak attack, and the casualties number in the hundreds. Now, Cyclops must mobilize the survivors to get to the bottom of who is behind these coordinated strikes on mutants in general and the X-Men in particular.

Marvel collected editions for March include:

- ***Avengers Assemble Volume Two HC***, collecting ***Avengers #s 12-22, 0, & Annual 1999*** by *Kurt Busiek, Jerry Ordway, John Francis Moore, George Pérez, Stuart Immonen, & Leonardo Manco*;
- ***Essential Doctor Strange Volume Two***, a phone-book sized compendium of ***Doctor Strange #s 169-178 & 180-183, Avengers #61, Sub-Mariner #22, Marvel Feature #1, Incredible Hulk #126***, and ***Marvel Premiere #s 3-10 & 12-14***;
- ***Essential Tomb of Dracula Volume Four***, collecting Dracula tales from ***Tomb of Dracula Magazine #s 2-6, Dracula Lives #s 1-13***, and ***Frankenstein Monster #s 7-9***
- ***Exiles Volume Nine: Bump in the Night***, collecting ***Exiles #s 52-58*** by *Tony Bedard, Jim Calafiore, & Mizuki Sakakibara*;
- ***Fantastic Four Visionaries: John Byrne Volume Four***, a trade paperback collecting ***Fantastic Four 3s 258-267, Alpha Flight #4***, and ***Thing #10***;
- ***Gambit: House of Cards***, collecting the first six issues by *John Layman & Georges Jeanty*;
- ***Inhumans Volume One: Culture Shock Digest***, collecting the first six issues of the limited series





by *Sean McKeever & Matthew Clark*;

- ***Madrox: Multiple Choices***, collecting the five-issue limited series by *Peter David & Pablo Raimondi*;
- ***Marvel Masterworks: The Fantastic Four Volume Eight***, collecting *Stan Lee & Jack Kirby's* ***FF #s 72-81*** and ***FF Annual #6***;
- ***Marvel Masterworks: Golden Age Captain America Volume One***, a hardcover compilation of the first four Golden Age issues by *Joe Simon & Jack Kirby*;
- ***Spider-Girl Volume Three: Avenging Allies Digest***, collecting *Tom DeFalco & Pat Olliffe's* ***Spider-Girl #s 12-16*** and ***Spider-Girl 1999 Annual***;
- ***Spider-Man: Spidey Strikes Back Volume One Digest*** by *Todd Dezago, Mike Raicht, Logan Lubera, & Valentine DeLandro*, collecting ***Marvel Age Spider-Man #s 17-20***;
- ***Ultimate Nightmare TP***, collecting the limited series by *Warren Ellis & Trevor Hairsine*;
- ***Ultimate Spider-Man Volume Twelve: Superstars***, a trade paperback collecting #s 66-71 of the series by *Brian Bendis & Mark Bagley*;
- ***Wolverine Classic Volume One***, a paperback compilation of the *Chris Claremont-John Buscema* tropical-adventurer Wolverine tales from the first five issues of Wolverine's first solo ongoing series;
- ***X-Force & Cable Volume One: The Legend Returns***, collecting the six-issue limited series by *Fabian Nicieza & Rob Liefeld*; and
- ***X-Men: The Complete Age of Apocalypse Epic Book One*** is a 360-page volume collecting the first quarter of the historic alternate-reality saga.

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